

***Cisticola dorsti* (Dorst's *Cisticola*) and *C. ruficeps guinea* are conspecific**

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The specific distinction of Dorst's *Cisticola* *Cisticola dorsti* was well demonstrated by its describers, Chappuis & Erard (1991), from three specimens collected in Cameroon and Chad, two of which had been tape-recorded (Chappuis 1974, under the name *C. mongalla*). Dorst's *Cisticola* was shown to be distinguishable vocally and morphologically from the parapatric Red-pate *Cisticola* *C. r. ruficeps*, with which it had been confused in the past. The distinctive song of Dorst's *Cisticola* was also tape-recorded in north-western Nigeria around Gusau (Chappuis & Erard 1991) (a gazetteer of localities is given below). The authors did not, however, examine in detail the relationship of Dorst's to the Upper Guinea *C. r. guinea*, something we have been able to do, in both field and museum. In particular the voice of *C. r. guinea* was undescribed until recently. Chappuis (*in* Chappuis & Erard 1991) had not heard the typical whistled song of *C. r. ruficeps* west of Maiduguri nor the dry trills of *C. dorsti* west of Gusau (both loci in Nigeria). In recent years, however, several observers have identified Dorst's *Cisticola* on the basis of its distinctive voice: in The Gambia (locally common in savanna woodland: Barlow *et al.* 1997), in northern Côte d'Ivoire (e.g. Rheindt *et al.* 2002), in south-west Mali and northern Ghana (FDL & RJD, see below) where it is also locally common.

This prompted one of us (NB) to re-examine the long series of *C. r. ruficeps* and *C. r. guinea* in the Natural History Museum (Tring), including topotypical material of *guinea* from Ghana (type locality Kintampo, Ashanti). Our conclusions are that *C. (r.) guinea* is synonymous with *C. dorsti*, and is the earlier name. The distribution of *C. r. ruficeps* is centred on Sudan, extending east to Eritrea and west to north-east Nigeria, northern Cameroon and southern Chad. This paper does not deal with the other two races included in *C. ruficeps* (*mongalla* and *scotoptera*) which are from areas to the east and south-east (Lynes 1930) and probably all referable to *C. ruficeps sensu stricto*.

The taxa concerned

Cisticola ruficeps ruficeps (Cretzschmar 1830), in Rüppell, W. P. E. S. 1826–30. *Atlas zu der Reise im nordlichen Afrika*: 54: pl. 36. Type locality: Kordofan, Sudan.

Cisticola (ruficeps) guinea Lynes 1930, *Ibis* (12) 6 (Suppl.): 542. Type locality: Kintampo, Ashanti, Ghana.

Cisticola dorsti Chappuis & Erard 1991, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 111: 60 (see also p.70). Type locality: near Mokolo, Cameroon.

Field investigations

We came across *C. r. ruficeps* in northern Cameroon: the species is common in low thorn scrub of the Sahel zone between Maroua, Mora and Waza. Several birds observed in the dry season on 20 March 1997 (FDL & RJD) were in non-breeding dress (with heavily streaked back) but already in full song.

In March 1999 FDL & RJD spent a month in Bénoué and Faro National Parks (NP), south of Garoua, and saw many Dorst's Cisticolas at several localities: at Buffle Noir, Sakjé, Grand Capitaine (Bénoué NP), Camp des Hippos and the Faro/Déo confluence (Faro NP). Birds had a rufous cap, a pale eyebrow, a brown-grey, mostly plain back, reddish wings and buffy flanks. They were often associated with the larger Singing Cisticola *C. cantans* and smaller Short-winged Cisticola *C. brachypterus*. There was little singing before 13 March when an unusually heavy and early storm provoked a burst of vocal activity in all cisticolas throughout the area for some ten days. The dry metallic trills characteristic of Dorst's Cisticola were heard almost daily on 14–24 March and were tape-recorded at Sakjé on the 14th. Playback of Chappuis's tapes of Dorst's Cisticola (in Chappuis 1974) provoked strong reactions in the bird tape-recorded. The birds were usually found feeding in dry grass, often unburnt patches, in the understorey of open scrubby or low-canopy woodland dominated by medium-sized trees such as *Burkea africana*, *Faurea speciosa*, *Lophira lanceolata* and *Protea madiensis*.

In February 2002 FDL & RJD encountered several Dorst's Cisticolas in south-west Mali (in the Monts Mandingues at Tambalé and Tombané, in the Haut Bafing at Soukoutali and at the Bafing–Balé confluence, in the Baoulé Sud area near Ntjila and near Madina Diassa) as well as just inside Guinea on the Balé. The habitat was similar to that in Cameroon, i.e. grassy understorey of fairly open Sudanian woodland. These birds were again often associated with *C. cantans* (the commonest cisticola in the area), less frequently with *C. brachypterus* or Rufous Cisticola *C.*

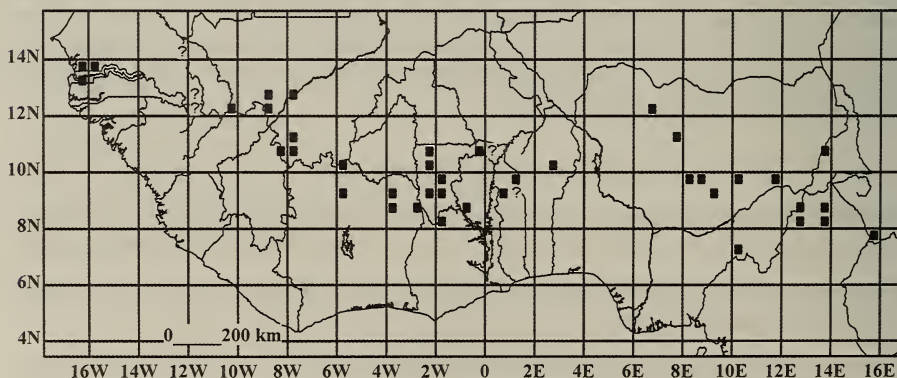


Figure 1. Distribution of confirmed records of *Cisticola guinea* in West Africa, with some (?) that require confirmation.

rufus. We identified them from their plumage (similar to that of Dorst's *Cisticola* in Cameroon, i.e. rufous cap, pale eyebrow, brown-grey back, reddish wings, warm buffy flanks), and voice. Although they were not singing spontaneously (February being 2–3 months before the start of the rains), one bird was brought into song through playback of the Chappuis tape, and gave an identical dry metallic trill. One bird mist-netted and photographed at Soukoutali on 11 February was in fresh plumage (wing 47.5 mm, tail 50 mm) with a slightly mottled back—a feature not obvious in field conditions where the back appears virtually plain.

On a second visit to south-west Mali, in May–June 2004, FDL & RJD encountered the species only once, but did not revisit the Haut Bafing nor the Mandingue Plateau. They found a singing bird in a patch of open woodland south of Kalana, on 25 May. The fresh grass was still short in the early rains, but the bird was right next to a pair of Red-winged Warblers *Heliolais erythropterus*—indicative of high rank grass in full summer.

Further investigations in northern Ghana, in and around Mole NP, were undertaken by the same observers at the peak of the rains, in August–September 2004. At that season all cisticolas were vocally very active and difficult to overlook. Dorst's was found at nearly all visited sites and could be qualified as locally common, occurring in patches of suitable habitat with several pairs in relatively close proximity. It was found at several places between Mole park headquarters and Brugbani camp, east of Brugbani camp (towards Haraba-Haraba pool), along the southern boundary road, near Mognori in the south-east and near Ducie in the west. In the majority, the habitat was short, open woodland on water-logged clay, and grass cover (mostly *Andropogon* sp.) was 1–2 m tall. In such wet places Dorst's frequently associated with Croaking *Cisticola* *C. natalensis* and *C. brachypterus*, and *Heliolais erythropterus* and Moustached Warbler *Melocichla mentalis*. The other characteristic habitat was short woodland on sand, with a subshrub cover (Tiliaceae, a *Triumfetta*) (e.g. east of Brugbani camp); in this dry woodland the common cisticola congeners were *C. cantans* and *C. rufus*, and Brown-rumped Bunting *Emberiza affinis* was also particularly conspicuous. Extensive tape-recordings were made on 10 August near Ducie, including the usual song-type (somewhat metallic or more liquid trills), the 'combat' song *pêe, pli-u pli-u pli-u pli-u* in reaction to playback, the high-pitched, slightly descending whistles *psee, psee, psee* often given in series (all in Chappuis 1974, 2000), and a series of dry *kif-kif-kif* calls, occasionally associated with 'combat' songs. On a subsequent visit to northern Ghana in February–March 2005 we also found Dorst's *Cisticola* in Gbele Resource Reserve and Bui National Park. This being the dry season, the birds were rather silent, and the first song was heard on 23 March.

Present-day distribution of Dorst's *Cisticola*

Based mostly on vocal evidence the presence of Dorst's *Cisticola* is now well established in the Sudanian (=Guinea) savanna belt from The Gambia to northern

Cameroon and adjacent southern Chad (Fig. 1). The presence of *C. ruficeps* has been claimed from as far west as Senegambia (Morel & Morel 1990) but there is as yet no vocal evidence that *C. ruficeps sensu* Chappuis & Erard (1991) occurs in the Sahel belt west of north-east Nigeria. Bates (1930) remarked that he had not found it west of northern Nigeria, and during his subsequent expedition through the Sahel of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, in 1931–32 (Bates 1933–34), he found nothing that could have been attributed to *C. ruficeps*. Other West African reports, which may or do refer to *C. dorsti*, and none of which can be accepted as *C. ruficeps*, are mentioned below in a review of the known distribution of Dorst's *Cisticola*.

Benin: *C. ruficeps* was recorded by Holyoak & Seddon (1990) from an unnamed locality at 10°25'N, 02°44'E (i.e. Gamia).

[*Burkina Faso*: Dowsett (1993) listed it on the basis of a still unpublished and undocumented record from Y. Thonnérieux (in MS), which cannot now be accepted.]

Cameroon: *C. ruficeps* is confirmed to occur in the Sahel south to Garoua (Chappuis & Erard 1991). *C. dorsti* ranges south from Mokolo (the type locality) to Benoué NP (Buffle Noir, pers. obs.).

Chad: *C. ruficeps* is known from the Ndjamena area, south even to Moundou, and *C. dorsti* further south still at Bekao and Baibokoum (Chappuis & Erard 1991).

Ghana: In addition to the type specimen of *guinea* (from Kintampo), there are others from localities north to 10°34'N (Gambaga). Records attributed to *C. ruficeps* from Mole NP (Grimes 1987) were confirmed as Dorst's by FDL & RJD in 2004. Mole is just 125 km north of Kintampo; the suitable woodland habitat starts just north of Kintampo town, and in 2005 the species was also found in Gbele Resource Reserve and Bui National Park (FDL & RJD pers. obs.).

Guinea: Found on the Guinea side of the border at the Bafing–Balé confluence in February 2002 (FDL & RJD pers. obs.).

Côte d'Ivoire: It is known that *C. dorsti* is present in Comoé (Rheindt *et al.* 2002) and Korhogo (unpublished tape-recording recently rediscovered by C. Chappuis *in litt.*). Thiollay (1985) wrote of *C. ruficeps*: 'Several mistnetted from Korhogo to M'Bingue. Cited from Comoé' (i.e. between c.09°22' and 10°N). Doubtless all references to *ruficeps* are in fact *dorsti*.

Mali: *C. dorsti* is known from a limited area of the south-west, from the Haut Bafing and Mandingue Plateau to the Ouassoulou Balé plain (see above). *C. ruficeps* is listed for the Koulikoro area by Robertson (2001: Important Bird Area 16), but we have no details. FDL & RJD searched for *C. ruficeps* well into the Sahel, north and east as far as Gao, but did not find any. Lamarche (1981) had reported *C. ruficeps* as widespread south of 16°30'N (and also gave Tamesna as a locality, 18°25'N); the specimens he mentioned as having collected were deposited at the Ecole Normale

Supérieure, Bamako (B. Lamarche *in litt.* 2002), but staff of that institution are quite unaware of any specimens at all having been left there (L. Granjon pers. comm. 2002). Duhart & Descamps (1963) reported a *C. ruficeps* collected at Kara (14°10'N), but no specimen that could possibly be this species is held in the collection of *Cisticola* spp. in the Paris museum (E. Pasquet *in litt.* 2003).

Niger: Giraudoux *et al.* (1988) reported observations of *C. ruficeps* at Dosso (13°03'N) and K. D. Christensen (*in litt.* 2004) saw one that he thought was this species between Diffa and Nguigmi (c.13°30'N, 12°45'E). Further investigation (including tape-recordings) is needed to confirm these identifications, which may relate to *C. ruficeps*.

Nigeria: Although Elgood *et al.* (1994) recognised *C. dorsti*, their treatment of *C. ruficeps* 'from Sokoto to Maiduguri and south to Zaria, ... Kafanchan and the Jos Plateau' must surely include some records of *C. dorsti*. These authors have certainly misinterpreted Chappuis & Erard (1991), who reported *C. ruficeps* only from Maiduguri (not *C. dorsti*), and not south to the Jos Plateau (the other localities under *C. ruficeps* relating to *C. dorsti*). They also overlooked a specimen record of *guinea* even further south, at Takum (Lynes 1930). The record from Kafanchan is of nests with eggs found by Serle (1940) and attributed by him to *C. r. guinea*. Most Nigerian records are thus probably referable to *C. dorsti*. There is vocal evidence in support of this, not only from Gusau (Chappuis & Erard 1991) but also between Kaduna and Jos—the song of *C. dorsti* can be heard in the background of the recording of *C. rufus* published by Chappuis (2000). *C. ruficeps* is possibly at Sokoto, where reported by Mundy & Cook (1972); singing birds were apparently tape-recorded, but we have not been able to trace the recording.

Senegal and The Gambia: Barlow *et al.* (1997) have shown that *C. dorsti* is present in Kiang West National Park (The Gambia), from where there are tape-recordings confirmed by C. Chappuis (*in litt.*). Lynes (1930) identified specimens from localities in The Gambia as *guinea* (confirmed by NB from material in Tring). There are records attributed to *C. ruficeps* from Senegal between 12°29'N (Kédougou) and 14°27'N (Kidira, in the Falémé) (Morel & Morel 1990) which may well prove to be *C. dorsti* too.

[*Sierra Leone*: Dowsett (1993) listed *C. ruficeps* on the basis of a misreading of Bannerman (1921), '*C. rufopileata*' being *C. anonymus*. We know of no record that could be either this species or *C. dorsti*.]

Togo: Specimens from Togo were ascribed to *Cisticola ruficeps* (Binaparba and Niamtougou), based on the publications of De Roo *et al.* (1969, 1971), and several other localities mentioned, north to Tantigou (10°51'N) (Cheke & Walsh 1996). M. Louette and R. Demey (M. Louette *in litt.* 2003) have confirmed that the skin from Binaparba is *C. dorsti*, that two alcohol specimens from that locality look similar and the Niamtougou specimen in alcohol is probably *dorsti* too.

Specimens of *C. r. ruficeps* and *C. r. guinea*

The collection at Tring holds 45 *C. r. ruficeps*: five juveniles (from Sudan), 31 non-breeders (26 from Sudan, four from Cameroon [Maroua/Mora], one from Nigeria) and nine breeders (eight from Sudan, one from Nigeria in such bad condition that its identity is open to question). There are also 40 *C. r. guinea*: four juveniles (from Ghana), 11 non-breeders (four each from The Gambia and Ghana, and three from Nigeria) and 24 breeders (one from The Gambia, 15 from Ghana, three from Nigeria and five from Chad: these last having been considered intermediate by Lynes 1930). In breeding dress the crown colour of *C. r. guinea* tends to be somewhat duller and darker than the red crown of *C. r. ruficeps* and shows a less clear-cut division with the mantle (which is browner); the vent and underparts appear buff rather than white. In most, the black-and-white pattern on the undertail-feathers exhibits less contrast than in *C. r. ruficeps*. These are all features of *C. dorsti sensu* Chappuis & Erard (1991), which were well seen in the field by us in Cameroon and Mali, in birds singing like Dorst's. Non-breeding dress is somewhat streaked but nowhere near that of non-breeding *ruficeps*, a difference that was also striking to Lynes (1930). On the basis of log-transformed data of tail, wing, bill and tarsus measurements, Chappuis & Erard (1991) kept *C. r. guinea* within the *ruficeps* concept and apart from their three *dorsti* specimens, but one of their *dorsti* birds virtually overlaps with a specimen of *C. ruficeps guinea* (their Fig. 2); the small sample of *dorsti* also makes the value of these measurements questionable.

Habitat and biomes of Dorst's *Cisticola* and *C. r. ruficeps*

All accounts of Dorst's *Cisticola* habitat refer to grassy understorey in open or scrubby Sudanian woodland (dry or seasonally wet), including secondary situations such as dense secondary shrub growth in cut-through savanna woodland (as in Barlow *et al.* 1997). The distribution of Dorst's *Cisticola* from Senegambia to Chad fits that of a 'Sudan-Guinea Savanna biome' species as defined by Fishpool & Evans (2001), this biome corresponding to the Sudanian region or phytchorion of White (1983).

In contrast, *C. ruficeps* appears restricted to grassy thorn scrub in the Sahel, the drier vegetation belt to the north of the Sudanian region (White 1983). *C. ruficeps* and Dorst's come closest to each other in northern Cameroon, with the former in the Sahel plain around Mora, and Dorst's in the adjacent Mandara (or Kapsiki) Mts to the west. The type locality of Dorst's ('near Mokolo') is said to be at an altitude higher than the Sahel plain (Chappuis & Erard 1991) and bears low or open Sudanian broadleaf woodland; Chappuis & Erard give no precise altitudes but Mokolo town is at 850 m whereas the Mora-Waza plain is c.300–350 m. Dorst's *Cisticola* is most common in the Bénoué plain to the south, which is dominated by Sudanian woodland and from which *C. ruficeps* appears absent (pers. obs.). Further east, as in Sudan, *C. ruficeps* occurs in the Sahel zone, where 'the hard and thorny

type of vegetation is dominant' (Lynes 1930). Thus these two cisticolas are well segregated ecologically and biogeographically.

Winter plumage of Dorst's *Cisticola* and its relatives

The winter dress of Dorst's *Cisticola* was not described by Chappuis & Erard (1991), as their three specimens were collected in the rainy season, in the months of June and August. The winter dress of *C. r. ruficeps* and Dorst's *Cisticola* observed in the same month, March, in northern Cameroon appears remarkably different, the former being heavily streaked on the back whereas the latter appears to have a plain back or only slightly mottled. Birds in southern Mali and northern Ghana also showed a plain back, although in the one bird handled in Mali it appeared to be slightly mottled. Similarly Lynes (1930) noted, concerning West African *C. r. guinea*, 'not very different to *ruficeps* in the summer, but rather markedly different in the winter dress', the streaking on the back being 'softer, of smaller colour contrasts'.

Conclusions

On the basis of coloration of breeding and non-breeding birds, in particular the distinctiveness of the winter dress of Dorst's *Cisticolas* seen in the field and of *C. ruficeps guinea* observed in the museum, on the vocal evidence showing Dorst's *Cisticola* to be widespread in West-Central Africa from The Gambia to Chad, and on the remarkable concordance of the 'vocal distribution' of Dorst's *Cisticola* with that of the specimen distribution of *C. ruficeps guinea*, we conclude that Dorst's *Cisticola C. dorsti* is a synonym of and is antedated by *C. (ruficeps) guinea*. 'Dans le cas présent, on peut considérer que *dorsti* est synonyme de *guinea*' (C. Erard *in litt.* 2004). *C. guinea* and *C. r. ruficeps* are no more than parapatric (in northern Cameroon, possibly in northern Nigeria), occupy different habitats and biomes, the former being Sudanian and the latter Sahelian. We recommend retaining the English name Dorst's *Cisticola* for what must now become *Cisticola guinea*.

Gazetteer of cited localities

Bafing-Balé confluence, Mali	12°14'N, 10°20'W
Baibokoum, Chad	07°46'N, 15°43'E
Baoulé River, near Madina Diassa, Mali	10°48'N, 07°40'W
Baoulé River, near Ntjila, Mali	11°17'N, 07°34'W
Bekao, Chad	07°51'N, 15°58'E
Binaparba, Togo	09°14'N, 00°46'E
Buffle Noir, Benoué NP, Cameroon	08°06'N, 13°50'E
Bui NP (Ntereso), Ghana	08°47'N, 02°35'W
Campement des Hippos, Faro NP, Cameroon	08°23'N, 12°49'E
Comoé NP, Côte d'Ivoire	09°25'N, 03°50'W
Diffa, Niger	13°19'N, 12°37'E
Dosso, Niger	13°03'N, 03°12'E

Ducie, Mole NP, Ghana	09°47'N, 01°57'W
Faro/Déo confluence, Faro NP, Cameroon	08°30'N, 12°43'E
Gambaga, Ghana	10°31'N, 00°22'W
Gamia, Benin	10°25'N, 02°44'E
Gao, Mali	16°16'N, 00°03'W
Garoua, Cameroon	09°18'N, 13°24'E
Gbele Reserve (Wahabu), Ghana	10°24'N, 02°04'W
Grand Captaine, Benoué NP, Cameroon	08°34'N, 13°57'E
Gusau, Nigeria	12°12'N, 06°40'E
Jos Plateau, Nigeria	c.09°54'N, 08°53'E
Kaduna, Nigeria	10°32'N, 07°24'E
Kafanchan, Nigeria	09°37'N, 08°18'E
Kalana, Ouassoulou Balé, Mali	10°47'N, 08°12'W
Kara, Mali	14°10'N, 05°01'W
Kédougou, Senegal	12°29'N, 11°57'W
Kiang West NP, The Gambia	13°20'N, 16°00'W
Kidira, Falémé, Senegal	14°27'N, 12°12'W
Kintampo, Ashanti, Ghana	08°04'N, 01°44'W
Kordofan, Sudan	c.13°20'N, 30°20'E
Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire	09°22'N, 05°31'W
Koulikoro, Mali	12°52'N, 07°33'W
Maiduguri, Nigeria	11°50'N, 13°09'E
Mandara (Kapsiki) Mts, Cameroon	c.10°30'N, 13°30'E
Maroua, Cameroon	10°36'N, 14°20'E
Mbingué, Côte d'Ivoire	10°00'N, 05°54'W
Mokolo, Cameroon	10°45'N, 13°48'E
Mole NP, Ghana	09°16'–09°22'N, 01°51'–01°57'W
Mora, Cameroon	11°03'N, 14°09'E
Moundou, Chad	08°35'N, 16°01'E
Ndjamena, Chad	12°07'N, 15°02'E
Nguigmi, Niger	14°15'N, 13°07'E
Niamtougou, Togo	09°46'N, 01°06'E
Sakjé, Benoué NP, Cameroon	08°10'N, 13°38'E
Sokoto, Nigeria	13°02'N, 05°13'E
Soukoutali, Bafing River, Mali	12°29'N, 10°17'W
Takum, Nigeria	07°13'N, 10°00'E
Tambalé, Monts Mandingues, Mali	12°33'N, 08°53'W
Tamesna, Mali	18°25'N, 03°33'W
Tantigou, Togo	10°51'N, 00°12'E
Tombané, Monts Mandingues, Mali	12°16'N, 08°46'W
Waza NP, Cameroon	c.11°25'N, 14°40'E
Zaria, Nigeria	11°03'N, 07°42'E

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